Listening Post Telecon
February 5, 2009
Minutes

QUESTION:

In President Obama's economic stimulus proposal there is significant funding to make federal facilities more energy efficient. What plans does ARS currently have in place or in development to distribute and effectively use this funding if this funding was to be realized?

ANSWER:

ARS has been conducting energy surveys and audits to identify potential energy saving projects at a number of our locations. The implementation of the stimulus package work will take several approaches including major maintenance and repair renovation work of larger centers, replacement of individual components in facilities, as well as targeted energy conservation measures where cost effective. In each case the energy saving opportunities will be considered. The design effort for the major centers renovations addresses energy efficient building automation systems, mechanical components, energy recovery systems and efficient lighting. Replacement of individual components such as boilers, chillers, air handling units, pumps etc. will select the most energy efficient equipment available. Stand alone energy savings projects will also be pursued when there is a reasonable pay back on the investment required. FD is working with ONP, BPMS, and the Areas to determine where funds will be allocated.   The locations will be notified by the Areas when allocation decisions have been made.

QUESTION:

Is there any written departmental policy on who can and cannot be an approving official in the US Bank purchasing system?

ANSWER:

AGAR Advisory 89, Part 2 contains a draft of DR 5013-6—Use of the Purchase Card and Related Alternative Payment Methods. DR 5013-6 contains a definition for an approving official along with a description of duties. In the draft, an AO is defined as a

"manager/supervisor". These are terms used in the old PCMS DR. We have been told by the Department when this draft DR is finalized they will drop the terms "manager/supervisor" and replace them with the term "first line supervisor".

QUESTION:

One participant reported that the US Bank supervisor of record does not show up in the system. Please explain.

ANSWER:

Yes. There are a few reasons the supervisor (approving official) does not appear in Access Online.

1. If the supervisory information was not updated in PCMS prior to transition and implementation, then the supervisor's name will not appear in US Bank's system. Agencies were given an opportunity to clean up the database in PCMS prior to data being transmitted to US Bank. The cut-off date for making changes in PCMS was August 1, 2008.

2. If a new supervisor was added after the Departmental cut-off date for PCMS changes, then the supervisor will not appear in Access Online. Agencies were asked by the Department to not order cards and make changes in PCMS after August 1, 2008. After the cut-off date, this information was not transmitted to Access Online. Agencies will have to add after the transition date of December 1, 2008.

REE APC is currently working with the areas/locations to get the supervisors inserted in Access Online.

QUESTION:

US Bank On-Line System (Purchase Cards), Approving Official Function:
Does ARS have any flexibility in naming who the approving official will be?

ANSWER:

Not at this time. The Department is reviewing this policy, but for now it has to be the cardholders first line supervisor.

QUESTION:

Since we have AD-700s, CATS, and quarterly reports must we approve things within the bank system too?

ANSWER:

All approving must be done electronically in the bank system, regardless of how many layers an office has in additional reviews. This is an OMB A-123 requirement.

QUESTION:

When a purchase is made there are two boxes to check – one says review not required and the other says review required. Why can't we check review not required?

ANSWER:

The two boxes exist because this is a commercial system, but USDA policy is we must always check review required.

Additional info: The Department is also reviewing what the approving policy will be (i.e., will it be all purchases or a random sample). Right now the system has no capability for doing random sampling.

QUESTION:

Request to extend the training deadline for US Bank Access for Approving Officials?

ANSWER:

The Department has mandated that all training be completed by 1/30/09, but they have extended it to 3/30/09. The fact that we can't reconcile at this time has no bearing on taking the training.

QUESTION:

Mandatory Training Requirements (who mandates annual requirement)? Does our Agency have some control?) The training requirement would depend on what type. One example is the annual IT Security Training Requirement, the other ADODR training, and how we will likely have it on an annual basis.

ANSWER:

The determination that training will be designated as mandatory occurs at different levels of the organization. There are some training requirements, such as IT Security Awareness and Civil Rights training, that has been designated as mandatory for all USDA employees by the Departmental staff offices. ARS has no control over this training. There are other functional or administrative training requirements designated by ARS/AFM through the Administrative and Financial Management Council as mandatory for a specific group of employees, such as ADODR training. When this occurs, it is the result of collaborative efforts by the AFM Deputy Administrator and Division Directors working with the Deputy Area Directors to provide development of certain competencies to ensure successful performance of specific tasks. We do have control over the scheduling of this training.

QUESTION:

What is the future of TUMS under planned FMMI implementation? Also, there was some discussion about what goes into TUMS – please clarify?

ANSWER:

USDA, Office of Chief Financial Officer is in the beginning stages of replacing TUMS, UTIL, and TELE. Each of these systems is currently used to collect telephone and utility data and

process invoice payments. The replacement is still in the beginning stages so, not a lot of information is currently available.

QUESTION:

There was also discussion that if bills are sent electronically to TUMS they won't show up in ECM – is this correct?
<u>**ANSWER:**</u>

ECM - There are currently two processes that can be used to submit utility invoices to NFC. Paper invoices submitted through ECM are available for on-line viewing. Invoices that are sent electronically are not processed through the ECM and are therefore not available for on-line viewing. We are currently working with NFC to determine if options can/will be made available to the agencies to be able to view these invoices in the future.

QUESTION:

Concern was expressed for the lack of coordination between utility companies, NFC, and locations. Discussion focused on a situation where the bill was sent directly to NFC, but contained information regarding a spike in usage that was never passed on by NFC to the location. What can be done to prevent this kind of situation from arising in the future?

<u>**ANSWER:**</u>

Locations are encouraged to verify that tolerance amounts are appropriately established in TUMS. Standard operating procedures require NFC to contact that Agency prior to processing payments that exceed the Agency established tolerances for telephone and utility accounts. A spike in usage should have resulted in a bill that exceeded tolerances.   NFC is in the process of investigating the circumstances of this particular situation.

QUESTION:

Status of TUMS and its replacement (ECM) and what should we be doing to prepare for transition?

ANSWER:

ECM is not replacing TUMs....ECM is the automated, on-line software that enables users access to invoices processed and paid. The release of this access software was a little delayed

QUESTION:

What is the status of FMMI?

ANSWER:

FMMI is progressing. The Department had their kickoff meeting in mid January. The REE agency teams were well represented.   The Department and Accenture Contractors are committed to help agencies ensure successful implementations. The REE teams are developing implementation schedules that will depict FMMI design and development throughout the spring, system testing in early summer, with system training throughout ARS in late summer. As we develop definitive plans they will of course be shared throughout the Agency and we will keep all apprised of key dates for advance planning.

QUESTION:

New Departmental HR Requirements for hiring including LA/STEP?

ANSWER:

Interim Selection Review Procedures: As part of the transition process, the Office of the Secretary (OSEC) has directed all USDA components to immediately route all proposed selection/reassignment decisions through OSEC for review prior to finalizing job offers. This interim review requirement applies to all permanent, term, and temporary placement actions including new appointments, conversions to new appointments, transfers into ARS, competitive promotions, and reassignments into new positions. The review requirement does not apply to career ladder promotions or promotions resulting from a position review process. In order to facilitate the submission and review process within REE, the Human Resources Division (HRD) will be preparing consolidated REE-listings of actions requiring the OSEC review. We will continue to process vacancies up to the point of job offer, including advertising, applicant rating, issuing certificates, and interviewing. For locations with

LA/STEP authority, please advise your servicing Human Resources Specialist that a tentative selection has been made so the position can be placed on our weekly submission to the Department. No job offers may be finalized until the requisite OSEC reviews have been completed. We are hopeful that this will only be a short-term requirement.

QUESTION:

The Miami location reports that all of its employees have registered for the LincPass but have not received any new cards. Can you offer an explanation? Also, can you provide any information?

ANSWER:

According to the "Applicant Status Report", Miami has 62 active employees; 59 employees have not had their employee record adjudicated ; 1 employee's card is in the printing process; 2 employee's card have been delivered; and 1 employee's card is activated. Until the employee's record is adjudicated, a LincPass cannot be printed. USDA has placed immediate priority on the National Capital Area and HRD has not focused on the investigations/adjudications required for the Miami location.   We will communicate the anticipated timeframe for focusing on the Miami investigations after refining an agencywide schedule.

QUESTION:

It was reported that HRD is requesting employee e-QIP data from AO's. Please provide an explanation.

ANSWER:

In order to initiate a NACI for an employee, the HRD, Personnel Security Staff, must register the individual in the automated investigative processing system (e-QIP) and the employee must complete the requisite information within 10 workdays after being registered in e-QIP. In order to facilitate obtaining the information needed on the employee(s), we have sought assistance from the appropriate AO. In the future, we will provide the AO's an advance listing of employees for which an investigation will be initiated at the location and only seek the AO's assistance if we are unsuccessful obtaining the information from the employee.

QUESTION:

How long does it take for an employee to be notified about their LincPass after the NACI is complete?

ANSWER:

It will take approximately 6-8 weeks for an employee to receive the LincPass after the NACI has been completed and the adjudication has been recorded in the LincPass system.

QUESTION:

When calling for the status of their LincPass, many employees are being told that their case is being "adjudicated". Please explain what this means.

ANSWER:

Adjudication means that favorable results of the employee's background investigation (normally a NACI) have been entered into the USAccess system (GSA Portal) which is part of the process that allows for an employee to obtain a LincPass. Again, we have placed immediate focus on the National Capital Area and a few other facilities which require that employees have the HSPD-12 compliant card for entry.

QUESTION:

LincPass status on distribution of the passes?

ANSWER:

For those who enrolled at a "fixed" enrollment station (e.g., Athens), the LincPass will be delivered to the enrollment station an average of 2-4 weeks after the employee has completed the initial enrollment (provided that a there is a background of record on the individual which has been recorded into the HSPD-12 system). Upon delivery of the LincPass, the employee should receive an automatic message to register for the card activation.

For employees who used a mobile enrollment station, LincPasses are being shipped to Agency Sponsors once they are activated at USDA's Centralized Card Distribution Center located in Ft. Collins, CO. A Point of Contact (POC) has been established at each location and will issue the credentials to the employees at their location. Credentials will not be issued until the POCs have taken the appropriate issuance training. Training is current being conducted – about a half of the POCs have completed the training. The training is being given by USDA-OCIO Identity & Access Management. There are some agency specific changes which will be discussed once all of the POCs have completed the training.

General LincPass Update:

While October 2008 was the initial target for issuing LincPasses to all long-term employees, the date has been extended within USDA based on all of the issues associated with employee enrollments, investigations, activations, etc. In accordance with HSPD-12, there must be a record of a satisfactorily adjudicated background investigation (normally a NACI) on an employee prior to issuing a LincPass and the adjudication must be recorded by a member of the HRD, Personnel Security Staff, in the USDA/GSA LincPass database. This has been a major challenge as there was no record of an investigation for approximately 3,000 ARS employees.

The immediate Departmental priority is to have LincPass credentials (the new HSPD-12 compliant identification cards) issued to employees within the National Capital Area (particularly those working in the USDA complex in D.C. or the Carver Center) and the enrollment of employees at locations with either a "fixed" or "mobile" enrollment station. Consequently, the LincPass credentials have not yet been generated for the vast majority of ARS employees who enrolled at enrollment stations outside the National Capital Area. Based on the large number of adjudications/investigations still needed, HRD is working with the Area Offices on a schedule for handling the future required investigations in priority order. We will provide the processing milestones to the AOs after a tentative schedule has been established. The following chart summarizes the current status of LincPass enrollments, activations, and issuances within ARS.

Current Status of Enrollments/Card Activations:

	ARS-Wide	National Capital Area
# of Employees	8401	1577
# Sponsored	7205	1576
# Enrolled	6550	1448

# Adjudicated	4258*	1092*
Cards Printing	149	58
Cards Delivered	725	105
Cards Activated	2716	867

*While approximately 1,100 "catch-up" investigations have been completed for current employees, NACIs are still required for approximately 1,800 ARS employees including 340 in the National Capital Area.

QUESTION:

What is Fast Track?

ANSWER:

Fast Track is a USDA eAuthentication Employee Registration Enhancement which makes it easier for USDA employees to obtain USDA eAuthentication credentials, and is accomplished by eliminating the need for first paycheck information. In addition to Michael's response, I also attached a screen shot of the new procedures an employee will see when attempting to create an eAuthentication account.

Fast Track

Current process requires:

- **Employee must have first paycheck in hand before registering**
- **Disclosure of 5 elements of PII data (including sull SSN, Pay Grade, and Net Pay Amount)**
- **Personnel Action Form must be completed**
- **Anywhere from 2 to 4 weeks**
- **If data entered by the employee does not match the NFC HR data, the employee must be contacted by the eAuthentication team and a security interview must be performed.**

New process (non EmpowHR Agencies);

- **HR enters new employee record into their HR system**
- **ARL (Michael Witles) checks for new records in ARL (Agency Registration Lead) E-mail Utility, obtains the employee's e-mail address from the employee (or from the address book), and enters it into the utility.**

- **Employee automatically receives an e-mail within 2-3 days (sometimes within the hour) inviting him/her to register for an eAuthentication ID**
- **Employee visits URL provided in invitation e-mail and registers for an eAuthentication ID (employee has 30 days to enroll; system reminds employee two more times)**
- **The eAuthentication system creates the new employee account.**

Prerequisites:

1. **Registrant must be a USDA Federal employee**
2. **Employee must have a complete HR record which includes: First name, Last name, SSN, Date of Birth, Agency, Work City, Work State**
3. **Employee must have a valid e-mail address**
4. **Employee must receive the Registration Invitation e-mail and respond to it**

This process will allow employees to get an eAuthentication account sooner and with less hassle on their part. HR does their part processing the new employee paperwork; NFC processes the new employee; the data is sent to eAuthentication; ARL (Michael Witles) checks the ARL e-mail utility adds the new employee's e-mail and generates the invitation to sign up for the account.

New USDA Federal Employees

To register for an eAuthentication account with level 2 access, you will need to receive a Registration e-mail. If you are a newly hired USDA Federal employee and have received a registration e-mail, do the following:

1. **Open the registration e-mail.**
   This e-mail was sent to the e-mail address that you provided to your Agency Registration Lead (ARL).

2. **Click on the link in the email.**
   This link will open your browser window and navigate to the *Activate Your Employee Account* page.

3. **Input the information requested.**

4. **Follow the remaining steps as instructed.**

Existing USDA Employees

To register for an eAuthentication Employee account with Level 2 access, you will need to receive a Registration e-mail. If you have not received this e-mail, or no longer have this e-mail, do the following:

1. **Contact an Agency Registration Lead for your agency.**
    Click on the link below to display a list of ARLs.
    http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov/AgencyRegistrationLeads.html

2. **Provide the ARL with an e-mail address.**
    The ARL will confirm your e-mail address, or if none exists, you will need to provide them a valid personal or Government issued e-mail address.

3. **Wait up to 24 hours for the registration e-mail to arrive.**
    All updates to e-mails are batch processed; therefore, it may take up to 24 hours for this e-mail to arrive

    Note: If you do not receive the Registration e-mail, check your "junk" folder, as some e-mail applications may incorrectly place this e-mail there. If you have questions regarding how to do this, contact the ITS Service Desk at eAuthHelpDesk@ftc.usda.gov or
    call 800-457-3642.

4. **Follow the steps under "New USDA Employees" above.**